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Ministry of Education

SCHOOL DISTRICT SIGNS SECOND ABORIGINAL AGREEMENT

NANAIMO – Nanaimo-Parksville MLA Ron Cantelon joined Aboriginal leaders and officials from the Nanaimo-Ladysmith school district today to sign the district's second Aboriginal enhancement agreement to improve Aboriginal student performance.

"The first Aboriginal enhancement agreement signed by the school district, Aboriginal leaders and the Province did a great deal to help Aboriginal students succeed," said Cantelon. "This new agreement will build on the successes of the first one and will help close the education gap for Aboriginal students in the Nanaimo-Ladysmith school district."

This second enhancement agreement has set four specific goals in the areas of academics, language and culture, personal development and positive learning environments. The goals are to improve Aboriginal student:

- Academic success, primarily in the areas of math and science.
- Knowledge of history, culture and language in order to enhance pride in Aboriginal heritage.
- Ability to achieve their educational and personal goals, especially in the areas of career and educational planning.
- Sense of belonging.

"We are working hard to build new relationships with B.C.'s Aboriginal people, and one way we're doing that is by including them in developing enhancement agreements," said Education Minister Shirley Bond. "By giving Aboriginal communities a voice in Aboriginal education, we are ensuring that the academic and cultural needs of Aboriginal students are being met so that they can achieve their best – and in Nanaimo they are."

The school district worked closely with local Aboriginal communities and the Ministry of Education to develop the enhancement agreement and to identify strategies to help reach the goals of the agreement. The strategies include:

- Providing a series of professional development workshops on Aboriginal history to enhance understanding.
- Ensuring every Aboriginal student completes an annual "goal and action plan."
- Creating Aboriginal student leadership opportunities.
- Exploring and implementing teaching strategies that are proven to be effective for Aboriginal learners.

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"This second agreement will provide continued direction to Aboriginal students by encouraging them to take ownership and pride in their educational journey and its focus will allow Aboriginal students to achieve at greater levels," said Candace Jacques, education representative, Council for the Cultural Preservation of the Metis Peoples. "Additionally, through the development of the agreement, dialogue has enhanced greater school and community knowledge, creating a potential to increase the circles of support for Aboriginal student development."

The Nanaimo-Ladysmith school district signed its first Aboriginal enhancement agreement in July 2001 and since then student achievement levels have improved in a number of areas. The Aboriginal completion rate in the district increased from 31 per cent in 2001 to 58 per cent last year, and the number of Aboriginal students writing provincial exams in language arts and sciences has increased.

"This renewed enhancement agreement will ensure that all of our efforts to improve the achievement of our First Nations students are carefully monitored and assessed," said school board chair Jamie Brennan. "We cannot be satisfied until the parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents of these children have faith that we are doing our utmost to support, encourage and motivate them towards success."

B.C. has signed 31 Aboriginal enhancement agreements to date. The agreements are one component of the Province's strategy to improve Aboriginal student achievement. Others include the new First Nations education jurisdiction agreement and developing Aboriginal content for K-12 curriculum. The Province provides $48.1 million a year – $950 per student – for Aboriginal education. The funds are used to support Aboriginal language and culture programs, Aboriginal support service programs, and other localized Aboriginal education programs.

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